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SURVEY OF AGRICULTURAL LABOR CONDITIONS IN WAYNE COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

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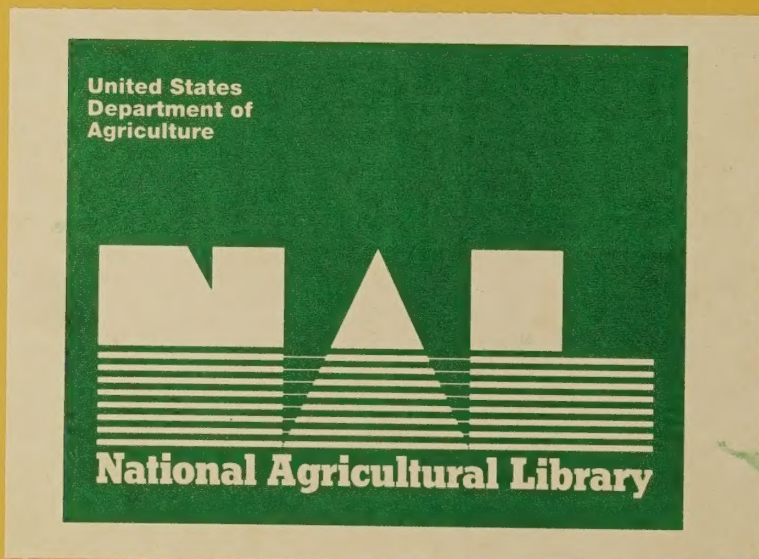
Tom Vasey, Farm Security Administration  
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This publication is one of a series of 11 with similar titles by Tom Vasey and Josiah C. Folsom. The reports are based on surveys made in the late summer and early autumn of 1936 of the economic and social conditions of adult agricultural laborers. The counties studied represent various types of farming in different parts of the United States, as follows:

<u>State</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>Type of Farming</u>
California	Placer	Fruit
Colorado	Archuleta	Stock-ranch
Illinois	Livingston	Corn
Iowa	Hamilton	Corn-Hog
Kansas	Pawnee	Winter wheat
Kentucky	Todd	Tobacco
Louisiana	Concordia Parish	Cotton (eastern)
Minnesota	Lac qui Parle	Small grain
Pennsylvania	Wayne	Dairy
Tennessee	Fentress	Self-sufficing
Texas	Karnes	Cotton (western)





## SURVEY OF AGRICULTURAL LABOR CONDITIONS IN WAYNE COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

By Tom Vasey, Farm Security Administration  
and  
Josiah C. Folsom, Bureau of Agricultural Economics

The Works Progress Administration during the summer and fall of 1936 provided the Bureau of Agricultural Economics with funds for research with respect to wages and working conditions affecting farm laborers. Studies were undertaken in 11 counties in as many different States. This report presents the data gathered from 214 agricultural laborers in Wayne County, Pennsylvania.

Enumerators were engaged to canvass hired farm laborers and their employers, and schedules were used to record the information secured from each group. The schedule designed for laborers was rather complete, covering, in addition to age, education and other such personal characteristics, job descriptions, wage rates, work histories for the preceding 12 months, and participation in community affairs. Farm operators were questioned concerning wage rates, fluctuations in numbers of employees, and methods of obtaining labor. /1

The enumerators were directed to use the limited time available for reaching as nearly as possible all the farms in the county hiring labor, except those that are not primarily dependent on agriculture as a source of income. The exceptions included country estates, livestock dealers, institutions, feed lots, boarding and lodging places, and unclassified farms. As to the laborers, the enumerators were instructed to interview "only those hired to do the work of adults at adult wages." This eliminated all unpaid family labor and any child labor receiving wage rates below those of adults. "Hired labor" or "employees" as the terms are used in this study refer to persons who work for wages and are dependent on the wages paid by the farm operator. The amount of these wages does not depend on the income derived from the crop. The status of the operator, whether renter or owner, was not considered.

Wayne County, which lies in the northeast corner of Pennsylvania, is in the New York City milk shed. As its undulating, rather rocky terrain makes it far more suitable for pasture land than for cultivation, it is largely devoted to dairy farms. The survey was made during the period

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/1 The work was directed by representatives of the United States Department of Agriculture. The officials of the Experiment Station and the Pennsylvania State College of Agriculture cooperated in selecting the area and in securing the enumerators, Fredland D. Clark of Tunkhannock and Russwald Gregg of Honesdale.



from September 21 to October 17, when the busiest season, haying, was already over. But, in addition to the regular dairy farm work which requires a fairly constant amount of labor, there was still some silo filling to be done. On many of the farms the family does most of the work; extra labor is hired only for the peak season. Sixty-five percent of the farms visited were not employing hired labor at the time of the survey, but 75 percent of the operators said they did employ casual labor when necessary. Of the 237 laborers employed on 154 farms, 214 were interviewed. Data presented here are taken from their schedules.

### General Characteristics

The hired laborers on the farms of Wayne County were chiefly young men. Most of them were under 30 years of age and three-fourths were under 40 (Table 1). Not a few were in their teens -- farmers' sons working out for wages. Those interviewed represented a rural group with relatively good schooling. Most of them had had an elementary school education and over 30 percent had had more than that. Table 1 shows that all but 44, or 21 percent, had completed the eighth grade, the grade which marked the termination point for most of these workers. Those with the least education are found in the older age groups. Of the 44 who had not completed the eighth grade, 35, or 80 percent, were 30 years of age or older, while of those who had gone beyond grammar school only 13 percent were 30 or over.

Table 1.- Age and schooling of 214 agricultural laborers,  
Wayne County, Pennsylvania, September 1936

Age	Total	Grades completed					
		0-4	5-7	8	9-12	than 12	Not reported
15	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
16	7	-	1	2	4	-	-
17	9	-	-	5	4	-	-
18	5	-	-	1	4	-	-
19	16	-	-	7	9	-	-
20 - 29	95	-	8	48	36	2	1
30 - 39	36	-	5	24	5	2	-
40 - 49	25	4	7	12	1	1	-
50 - 59	10	2	7	1	-	-	-
60 - 69	10	2	7	1	-	-	-
70 - 79	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
Totals	214	9	35	101	63	5	1

Most of the workers were unmarried. Half of all those interviewed were single men under 30 years of age, and a fairly large proportion of the older men were still unmarried. Twelve were divorced or separated from their wives (Table 2).

Table 2.- Marital status of 214 agricultural laborers by age,  
Wayne County, Pennsylvania, September 1936

Marital status	Total	:10-19	:20-29	:30-39	:40-49	:50-59	:60-69	:70-79
Unmarried	148	37	71	17	12	7	4	-
Married	54	-	21	19	10	2	2	-
Separated, divorced, or widowed	12	-	3	-	3	1	4	1
Totals	214	37	95	36	25	10	10	1

As would be expected with a high percentage of unmarried workers, nearly three-fourths reported no dependents (Table 3). Almost without exception the dependents reported were the wives or children included in normal family groups. Only 4 percent of the families which are represented here by the wage-earner contained more than 4 members, the head and 3 dependents.

Table 3.- Dependents of hired farm laborers,  
Wayne County, Pa., September 1936

Number of dependents	Number	Percent
0	157	73.4
1	20	9.3
2	15	7.0
3	13	6.1
4	2	.9
5	6	2.8
6	0	-
7	0	-
8	1	.5
Total	214	100.0



These agricultural laborers in Wayne County had moved about very little. Only a scattering few were born outside the State. Even a smaller number gave their residence as other than Pennsylvania, despite the fact that Wayne County is bordered on two sides by New York State. Only 10 had sought work outside the State since 1930, and most of these reported only one migration. Six of the 7 who gave their residence as other than Pennsylvania came into the State in 1936, and their eventual return to their home States might be considered as problematical. The one Negro worker interviewed had come from Virginia in 1936 and still considered that his home (Table 4).

Table 4.- Nativity and residence of 214 agricultural laborers, Wayne County, Pa., September 1936

State or locality	Nativity		Residence	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Pennsylvania	189	88.4	207	96.7
New York	12	5.6	6	2.8
Foreign countries	8	3.7	-	-
New Jersey	2	.9	-	-
North Carolina	2	.9	-	-
Virginia	1 /1	.5	1	.5
Totals	214	100.0	214	100.0

/1 Negro; all others white male workers.

All those interviewed were general farm laborers who did whatever work was necessary on the dairy farms of Wayne County. None stated that he was hired for harvest work only, or for any other specific task. The only time of the year when an appreciable number of casual employees might have been found in Wayne County had occurred somewhat earlier during the haying season.

#### Tenure Experience

The theory of the "agricultural ladder" assumes that the young farm laborer is able in time to become a tenant and eventually an owner. Only 7 percent of the large number of young men interviewed had had any experience as farm operators; 93 percent had had none (Table 5).

Table 5.- Previous farm-operation experience of 214 white male farm laborers, Wayne County, Pa., September 1936

Experience	Number	Percent
None	200	93.4
Sharecropper	1	.5
Tenant	4 /1	1.9
Owner	9	4.2
Totals	214	100.0

/1 Includes one Negro.

A change in tenure status was not always a step down the agricultural ladder. The one sharecropper had come from Virginia several years before, seeking to improve his position; one tenant had given up his place to take a farm job that paid \$70 a month and free rent; one owner was still operating his own farm but was working out to supplement his income. For others it had been a step down -- owners had lost their farms through foreclosure, or tenants had had their places sold from under them.

### Income

Annual incomes of these workers varied greatly, ranging from mere maintenance to \$1,200 (Table 6). Nearly three-fourths received less than \$400. The highest income reported was that of one worker with full-time employment in agriculture. He was the 30-year-old son of the owner and had worked for his father since he was 12 years old. His earnings in reality represented a share of the profits.

Table 6.- Total income, September 1935 to August 1936, of 210 agricultural workers, Wayne County, Pennsylvania

				:Agricultural:		Nonagricultural:			
Total	:Number:	Percent:	earnings	: earnings	: earnings	: Relief income			
income	:	:	Average	:Number:	Average	:Number:	Average		
\$ 1 - 49	8	3.8	\$40.33	-	-	-	-		
50 - 99	9	4.3	84.00	-	-	-	-		
100 - 149	15	7.1	108.86	2	\$96.50	-	-		
150 - 199	27	12.8	167.44	3	70.67	-	-		
200 - 249	28	13.3	225.50	2	165.00	-	-		
250 - 299	12	5.7	200.67	5	177.60	1	\$60.00	/1	
300 - 349	23	10.9	277.57	3	246.33	-	-		
350 - 399	29	13.8	330.18	6	214.50	-	-		
400 - 449	6	2.9	278.33	3	291.67	-	-		
450 - 499	13	6.2	432.31	1	432.00	/2	-		
500 - 549	6	2.9	381.67	2	445.00	-	-		
550 - 599	2	1.0	577.50	-	-	-	-		
600 - 649	4	1.9	600.00	1	600.00	-	-		
650 - 699	5	2.4	513.75	2	633.00	-	-		
700 - 749	10	4.8	531.80	3	614.33	-	-		
750 and over	/3	13	6.2	541.08	6	764.00	1	216.00	/4
Total or average	210	100.0	\$285.96	39	\$362.54	2	\$138.00	/4	

/1 Direct relief.

/2 One dependent earned \$150 in nonagricultural earnings, not included here, but included in total income.

/3 As high as \$1,200.

/4 Work relief.



Most of the laborers depended solely on agricultural work during the year. Those who did only farm work reported as much income as the 39 who had other sources of income as well. None of the dependents of these farm laborers reported earnings in agricultural work, and only one received an income from other sources. Four-fifths of the total amount of income reported came from agriculture, most of the remainder from other work, and only a small amount from relief agencies.

For those with incomes from several sources the nonagricultural work frequently proved the most important. One worker earned \$1,000 as a teamster in 10 months as compared with \$50 in 6 weeks in agriculture. Nonagricultural work grows in importance as the higher incomes are approached. Numerically, the workers with mixed employment are evenly distributed among those with total incomes above \$100, but their percentage within each income group is increasingly important as the higher groups are reached. The nonagricultural work was chiefly on construction jobs. Many of the men had been working on the new highway just out of Honesdale; a few had worked on buildings in town. Forestry work was the second most prevalent nonagricultural source of income.

During the year preceding the interview most of the men had full-time or nearly full-time employment. Three-fifths of them had 270 or more days' work on farms; 13 others, who combined agriculture with other work, reported a comparable length of employment (Table 7). As a general rule, however, the workers in both agricultural and nonagricultural enterprises did not have so much employment during the year as those doing only farm work.

Table 7.- Days worked in agricultural and nonagricultural employment <sup>/1</sup> by 208 farm laborers, Wayne County, Pennsylvania

Days worked	:Agriculture:		Mixed employment	
	: Number	: Number	: Average in : :agricultural:	: Average in : :nonagricultural
0 - 29	7	-	-	-
30 - 59	4	-	-	-
60 - 89	4	2	23	50
90 - 119	4	2	10	92
120 - 149	6	5	67	71
150 - 179	8	3	102	60
180 - 209	4	4	62	132
210 - 239	3	2	84	146
240 - 269	5	6	184	73
270 - 312	126	13	135	157
Total or average	171	37	108	111

<sup>/1</sup> The number of days in the 12 months immediately preceding the date of the interview.



Relief, whether in the form of work relief or direct relief, was hardly a factor in the income of agricultural workers in Wayne County.

Despite the relative stability of these workers, they reported little property or savings. However, 97 of the workers owned cars. Few owned livestock, and only 2 reported the ownership of any farm land although 9 had other real estate. Life insurance averaging \$1,287 was carried by 109 laborers, and bank accounts averaging \$436 were reported by 25. Of those interviewed, 35 refused to give any information concerning their savings and insurance.

#### Wage Rates

The prevailing method of pay was by the month, with board; three-fourths of the laborers were paid on this basis. Most of the others received monthly pay and house rent, a few received monthly pay with no perquisites, and a few were paid by the day (Tables 8 and 9). Reports from the farm operators showed a similar emphasis on monthly rates with board, although they mentioned payment by the day much more frequently.

Laborers reported average rates of pay, disregarding perquisites, as \$1.46 per day and \$29.46 per month; farm operators reported \$2.14 and \$29.15 respectively. Practically all the workers received additional wages in kind, but evaluation of such non-monetary income is difficult if not impossible. The schedules of the very few laborers who were paid by the day do not show the value of board, but, according to the five operators, rates without board averaged 81 cents more than rates with board. Laborers reported a monthly average of \$44.50 without board, of \$23.94 with board, and of \$48.79 with house rent. Those who receive board generally also receive lodging, and those who are furnished house rent get additional perquisites. Milk is the principal additional item, but garden space is allotted to most workers who are supplied a house. Apparently, the value of these perquisites does not enter into the determination of the wage rate, the better workers receiving more of each.

Comparison of wage rates for the State of Pennsylvania as listed by the United States Department of Agriculture and as shown by this study for Wayne County is possible in only one category -- monthly rates with board. The average rate for the State, as of October 1, 1936, was \$25.25; the operators' reports for Wayne County average \$23.85 and the laborers' reports, \$23.94.

Considering the actual wage rates, it is apparent that averages do not represent the rates most frequently paid. Though the spread was great, two-thirds of all the laborers received \$15, \$20, or \$30.

All worked long hours and 6 days a week, and a few worked 7 days. The average per day was more than 12 hours and there was no relation

between the length of day and wages received. Many 14-hour days were reported.

Table 8.- Monthly wage rates and perquisites of hired farm laborers, Wayne County, Pennsylvania, 1936

Rate	Operator reports				Laborer reports			
	:Without:		:With:		:Without:		:With:	
	Total:	board	board:	house:	Total:	board	board:	house:
\$ 5.00	1	-	1	-	2	-	2	-
6.00	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
8.00	3	-	3	-	3	-	3	-
10.00	4	-	4	-	4	-	4	-
12.00	2	-	2	-	2	-	2	-
15.00	18	-	18	-	19	1	18	-
18.00	3	-	3	-	1	-	1	-
20.00	33	-	32	1	41	-	38	3
21.00	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
22.00	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
24.00	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-
25.00	34	-	34	-	35	1	34	-
27.50	4/1	-	4/1	-	1/2	-	1/2	-
30.00	24	-	19	5	33	-	30	3
32.50	2	-	2	-	2/3	-	2/3	-
35.00	4	-	4	-	6	-	5	1
40.00	11	-	4	7	18	-	8	10
45.00	5	-	1	4	5	-	2	3
50.00	6/4	1/4	1	4	7/5	2	-	5/5
55.00	3	-	-	3	3	1	-	2
60.00	5	-	1	4	7	-	1	6
65.00	3	1	1	1	1	-	-	1
70.00	4/6	1/6	1	2	3/6	1/6	-	2
75.00	1	-	-	1	1	-	-	1
80.00	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
85.00	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
100.00	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Total	174	4	138	32	198	6	153	39
Averages	\$29.16	\$67.00	\$23.85	\$47.34	\$29.46	\$44.50	\$23.94	\$48.79

- /1 Includes one report of \$28. /2 Includes one report of \$28.  
 /3 Includes one report of \$32. /4 Includes one report of \$51.  
 /5 Includes one report of \$48. /6 Includes one report of \$72.



Table 9.- Day wage rates and perquisites of hired farm laborers, Wayne County, Pennsylvania, 1936

Rate	Operator reports /1::			Laborer reports /2		
	:Without:		With ::	:Without:		With
	:Total:	board :	board ::	Total:	board :	board
\$0.75	-	-	-	2	1	1
1.00	5	-	5	2	-	2
1.25	1	-	1	-	-	-
1.50	10	-	10	-	-	-
1.60	1	-	1	1	1	-
2.00	34	1	33	4	1	3
2.25	2	-	2	-	-	-
2.50	15	1	14	-	-	-
2.80	1	-	1	-	-	-
3.00	9	1	8	-	-	-
3.50	2	2	-	-	-	-
4.00	1	-	1	-	-	-
Totals	81	5	76	9	3	6
Averages	\$2.14	\$2.90	\$2.09	\$1.46	\$1.45	\$1.46

/1 Operator reports, in case of more than one employee, are average rates he paid at the time of the interview.

/2 Laborer reports are for the specific job at which the informant was found working in September or October, 1936.

#### Tenure of Employment

The employment of agricultural laborers is generally unstable, being dependent on the seasons. Dairy work is more regular than other types of farming because of the emphasis on care of the stock rather than on growth of crops. The average number of employees per farm as reported by the operators ranged from 1.5 at the time of the interview and 1.3 in the winter to 2.6 at the busiest period -- usually July haying. This maximum demand is twice as great as that at the low point of employment.

One-half of the workers interviewed had been employed a year or more on the same job; two-thirds had been in the same place approximately 6 months. Table 10 indicates the month and year when work began for each laborer who was interviewed. Jobs which began during the months of April, May, and June appear to be relatively permanent. Of those workers who began on their present jobs before 1936, two out of five started work in those months. Two-thirds of the 39 who obtained employment during any September were hired in 1936. Apparently those laborers who are employed late in the year work only a few weeks at silo filling and are then dismissed.

Table 10.- Year and month that 214 present farm jobs began,  
Wayne County, Pennsylvania

Month	: Total	: 1930 or before	: 1931	: 1932	: 1933	: 1934	: 1935	: 1936
January	16	6	2	1	-	2	1	4
February	5	-	1	-	1	1	-	2
March	15	-	-	-	1	2	6	6
April	36	9	2	4	4	3	-	14
May	23	4	2	4	-	1	-	12
June	25	3	-	1	1	2	4	14
July	21	-	-	1	-	3	4	13
August	12	-	-	1	1	1	2	7
September	39	2	-	-	1	1	9	26
October	14	-	-	-	2	3	3	6
November	5	1	1	2	-	1	-	-
December	3	1	-	-	1	-	1	-
Totals	214	26	8	14	12	20	30	104

Table 11.- Methods of placement of farm laborers, Wayne County,  
Pennsylvania, September 1936

Method	Laborer reports		Operator reports	
	Number	Percent /1	Number	Percent /2
Laborers' search	172	80.8	11	7.1
Operators' search	5	2.3	136	88.3
Through a friend	28	13.2	-	-
Advertised	2	0.9	6	3.9
Answered an advertisement	6	2.8	-	-

/1 Percent of specific jobs obtained by the given method.

/2 Percent of 154 employers reporting the use of a given method in 1936; since more than one method may be reported by an employer this column does not total 100 percent.

Most of the operators said they did not employ any seasonal labor; one-third employed no extra help for harvest time. For those hiring harvest labor the length of employment was from 1 to 4 weeks.

The permanence of employment of most of the workers hired by the month is indicated by the high average tenure -- 31 months. For those employed by the day or by the hour the average is less than 1 month.



Direct contact between the operator and the laborer was the usual method of getting employment. A few used advertisements and some were told of openings by friends. Both operators and laborers state that the direct inquiry method was the most common, and each group gives itself the credit for taking the initiative (Table 11).

### Community Participation

Farm laborers reported very little participation in the activities of the formal organizations of the community. Four laborers had been members of nonagricultural labor unions and two were members of such unions at the time of the survey. However, no members of agricultural workers' unions were reported. Two were members of the Dairymen's League, and 14 were present or past members of the Grange.

Only 5 laborers lived in a town. Practically all of the 209 others went to town once or twice a month to shop (Table 12). The next most important source of social contact came through various religious services. Over half of the workers attended the general group gatherings held in the county. Only 6 attended any farm practice demonstrations and none had attended farmers' institutes during the 12 months preceding the interviews.

Table 12.- Informal community activity of 214 hired farm laborers, September 1935 - September 1936, Wayne County, Pa.

Activity	: Number : reporting	: Percent : reporting	: Average : reported
Shopping	203	94.9	20.2
Religious meetings	155	72.4	24.3
Moving pictures	143	66.8	19.1
Community entertainment	139	65.0	9.1
Circus	101	47.2	1.2
Ball games	74	34.6	6.6
Fishing trips	54	25.2	9.9
Visits to friends or relatives	51	23.8	4.2
Farm practice demonstrations	6	2.8	1.7
Farmers' institutes	-	-	-

To summarize, dairying in Wayne County requires regularity of employment in contrast to crop farming. Increased responsibility in the handling of livestock makes for some relatively high wages and annual incomes. Most of the laborers who were interviewed had steady employment. Despite the apparent regularity of employment and stability of residence, participation of this group in the life of the community is limited almost entirely to informal contacts.

The composite picture of agricultural laborers in Wayne County probably approximates the usual idea of the hired man on the family farm as well as any that can be found elsewhere in this country.

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